

## **Departments of Justice, Revenue Ask Newspapers Not to Accept Ads for Illegal Tobacco Sales**

The Montana Departments of Justice and Revenue have asked Montana newspapers not to accept advertising from companies that illegally sell tobacco products. The letter, signed by Attorney General Mike McGrath and Department of Revenue Director Dan Bucks, was sent out January 28.

As a result of last fall's passage of I-149, tobacco taxes in the state increased \$1 per pack beginning Jan. 1. Since then, the Department of Justice has seen an increase in reports of ads for "tax-free" or "duty-free" cigarettes. Such cigarettes lack the appropriate tax insignia and may not be listed on the Directory of Tobacco Products Approved for Sale in Montana.

"It's illegal to sell these types of tobacco products in Montana," said McGrath. "We're hoping that these papers will not accept these ads until each advertiser can confirm it is paying applicable taxes and selling only those products in the directory."

The letter advises the papers that the ads are "misleading and invite illegal sales." It asks the companies to "take appropriate steps" to ensure that sellers of such products do not use Montana papers to facilitate violations of state law.

The letter was sent to publishers of Montana dailies in Billings, Bozeman, Butte, Helena, Great Falls, Kalispell and Missoula; the Queen City News and SmartSource, an ad supplement inserted in some Sunday papers. McGrath said the departments will likely be in touch with other Montana publications.

The letter to the papers comes about a week after 42 attorneys general – including McGrath – wrote similar letters to the nation's major credit card companies, seeking assistance in stopping illegal tobacco sales via the Internet.

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